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ABSTRACT

The implications of physical and biological sex differences on sex role behavior cannot be understood without analyzing the complementary role of the sociocultural meaning of sex roles. The normative aspect of gender role behavior is fluid and can be affected by culture, class, and ethnicity. All societies recognize differences between the sexes. The cross-cultural variation in male and female roles does not support the theory that differences are biologically determined. Variations probably result from interrelationships between socioeconomic and cultural influences. Research indicates that lower class children define masculine and feminine characteristics and roles as sharply different while the middle class displays more mutuality in sex role interchange. Research also indicates that ethnicity and cultural heritage influence sex role differences. The level of education and distance between kin will often act to nullify many of the traditional cultural effects, but cultural influences on sex role behavior may be stronger than the socioeconomic influence among some groups. The fact that sex role behavior can be affected by sociocultural factors and that sex differentiation exists does not, however, rule out the concept of equality of opportunity for males and females.
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THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SEX ROLE DIFFERENCES: CLASS AND ETHNIC FACTORS

By Jerome W. Wright

That there are biological/anatomical differences between male and female is perhaps the only agreed upon postulate in the study of sex roles. The effects that the biological and the socio-cultural have on sex role determination, however, are the basis of a myriad of discussions and debates. For instance, where a biological basis for sex differentiation exists, how might socio-cultural factors affect this biological orientation?

Anthropological View of Sex Differentiation

There seems to be a general agreement that the biological differences between the sexes necessitate a division of labor in which women bear children and men are primarily responsible for securing the means of subsistence - especially during pregnancy and nursing when the female is often incapacitated. Anthropological data give an indication that there is an association between the type of subsistence economy and the physical energy needed in that society and the position of women relative to that of men. Yet, this hypothesis does not explain sex-role differentiation for complex-industrial societies where the physical capacities needed in the society are lessened by technological innovations.

One anthropological explanation that has been offered minimizes the biological or physical capacity required by the society but instead focuses on cultural inheritance. That is, where in non-industrial societies social power is assumed to be a product of physical strength, mobility, and agility; women's roles are inferior because of their incapacities brought on by childbearing and childrearing. The explanation for the inequality of the sexes found in most industrial societies is thought to be due to the

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passive acceptance by the society of pre-industrial social habits norms and traditions, transmitting them from generation to generation.

Anthropological research has also related sex differentiation to family structure. The hypothesis being that in the isolated nuclear family responsibility cannot long be divided on the basis of biological differences, since marital partners must substitute for one another when either is ill or away from the home. It is much easier to maintain such a in situations or among groups where the extended family exists because same-sexed members are usually available to perform c "sex-type" job.

Holter (1970) notes that differentiation of roles by gender is a universal characteristic of social organization, and the absence of societies locking in such differentiation makes it difficult to reject hypotheses of allocating roles. Yet there are obvious variations in the degree to which sex roles are differentiated. A comparison, for example, of European Latin countries with the Scandinavian ones reveals striking dissimilarities in types and degree of differentiation; a fact that makes it possible to consider the determinants of some variations.

Perhaps the first glimmer of the effects of culture upon sex and gender occurred with the work of Margaret Mead. In Sex and Temperament (1935, p.280) she pointed out the impact of culture on sex typing. Mead's study of three New Guinea cultures pointed out how the Tchambuli, Mundugumar, and Arapesh assigned sex roles differently than those in Western culture. Mead writes: "We are forced to conclude that human nature is almost unbelievably maleable, responding accurately and contrastingly to different cultural conditions. The differences between individuals who are members of

different cultures, like the differences in conditioning, especially during early childhood, and the form of this conditioning is culturally determined. Standardized personality differences between the sexes are of this order; cultural creations to which each generation, male and female, is trained to conform."

Mead (p.279) further elaborates, "If those temperamental attitudes which we have traditionally regarded as feminine - such as passivity, responsiveness, and a willingness to cherish children - can to easily be set up as the masculine pattern in one tribe, and, in another, be outlawed for the majority of women as for the majority of men, we no longer have any basis for regarding aspects of such behavior as sex-linked."

The fact that roles for males and females show cross-cultural variation was a major blow to the biological determinist theory but this finding did not however, rule out the fact that there are differences between the sexes. Rosaldo (1974, p.18) emphasized that "every known society recognizes and elaborates some differences between the sexes, and although there are groups in which men wear skirts and women wear pants or trousers, it is everywhere the case that there are characteristic tasks, manners, and responsibilities primarily associated with women or with men. The major issue however, still focuses on the impact of socio-cultural factors on these role differences. Holter (op. cit.) notes that it is generally accepted that sex role norms and sex typed behavior are acquired by contact with socio-cultural agents, and not primarily influenced by biological factors. Even the supporters of the cognitive-developmental approach who emphasize the child's categorization of himself according to gender, assume that this depends on the awareness of bodily differences. Yet, she continues, the same theorists stress, and demonstrate

empirically, that children's categorizations of gender are based on clothes, hairstyles, and other culturally ascribed characteristics, not on conceptions of genital organs.

Much of sex-role behavior is learned throught the process of socialization, that is, the process by which an individual acquires the skills, knowledge and disposition that enables that individual to participate with relative ease with other members of the group or society. Gender role is the socially learned pattern of behavior that differentiates men from women.

According to Duberman (1975, p.26), a society decides what is considered masculine and what is feminine, and the individual interprets these decisions and applies them to him or herself. Duberman points out that gender is a learned behavior usually related to one's sex, but that sex status does not necessarily determine gender role. One's degree of proficiency in playing one's gender role depends on how well one has been socialized, how much one seeks approval from society, and how much one's gender-role performance has been reinforced with positive functions.

Interestingly, gender role learning occurs very early in the development of the child. Children learn what is appropriate behavior for girls and boys primarily from role models who may be parents in the traditional sense of peer group members in other situations.

Kagan's (1964) work points out how the cultural definitions of masculine and feminine behavioral responses are internalized by children as young as three years old. Children of this age know the appropriate parental sex role behavior and how upset when these normative prohibitions are broken.

In terms of the sex role socialization of boys and girls, little difference occurs in the process. Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) Survey of data on sex role socialization revealed a high degree of uniformity in the socialization of the two sexes. There was no evidence that revealed any consistent process of shaping boys and girls toward a number of behaviors that are normally part of our sex stereotypes. There were, however, some interesting revelations from the data survey. First, boys seem to have more intense socialization experiences than girls. They receive more pressive against engaging in sex-inappropriate behavior, whereas, the activities that girls are not supposed to engage in, are much less clearly defined - and less firmly enforced. Boys receive more punishment, but probably also more praise and encouragement. Adults respond as if they find boys more interesting, and more attention-provoking than girls.

It was noted earlier in the paper that much of the process of gender learning was based on role model initiation. The social learning theorists do stress the importance of the parents as providing and maintaining the necessary sex-role model. Other theorists see the role of parents as one of a number of possible models, noting that often among black children, peer group members are important gender-role models.

As one might expect, adherence to and the maintenance of gender role is reinforced by a conscious or unconscious punishment and reward system. In learning sex roles, investigators have found that boys learn to behave according to current definitions of masculinity, girls to behave according to the concepts of femininity. The point out that the concepts of masculinity and feminity do vary historically and geographical but that usually, masculinity involves some degree of dominance, aggressiveness, and instrumentality; femininity is frequently defined in terms of submissiveness, modesty, and nurturance.

An important point of investigation in the investigation of gender role learning has been whether or not gender-role difference is related to differential treatment of boys and girls. Parsons (1955), for example, sees equity in the treatment of boys and girls in our society while Barry (1957) found differentiation of sexes unimportant in infancy, but that in childhood, nurturance, obedience, and responsibility are frequently reinforced in girls, and self-reliance and achievement striving reinforced in boys. L.B. Murphy (1962) has found that investigations of early child care indicate subtle differences in the ways parents handle boys and girls even in infancy. Most studies, however, indicate that parents, though they differ in their insight and the efficiency of their methods, elicit and maintain sex differentiation.

The research overwhelmingly indicates that most gender-role behavior is learned behavior rather than being biologically determined. Yorburg's (1974) contention is that research on sex roles by anthropologists has focused on cultural and subculturally defined conceptions of masculinity and femininity because these have varied in place and time. She maintains that such conceptions are learned by most people, beginning at birth, within the family, and that they are usually reinforced throughout the society and throughout the life cycle. These conceptions determine the basic identity or self image that is typical of men and women in a specific society at any given time.

Yorburg's premise is that the learning of sex-typed roles that embody culturally defined conceptions of masculinity and femininity results in typically different personality traits for males and females. Psychologists have studied the development and existence of differences in behavior, thought, and emotion in male and female children and adults. Insofar as these differences are typical, they tend to be largely a product of common

sex-typed learning experiences based on differing role expectations for males and females. The personality or psychological implications of sex-role difference is discussed in another paper in this monograph.

Class and Gender Role Difference

Class differences and gender role have been investigated in order to closely examine the non-biological factors affecting sex differences. Monroe and Monroe (1974, p.119) describe the plasticity in sex-role behavior and point out how sex roles are highly variable, by age and by social class among other ways. "Language, dress, posture, gesture - innumerable socio-cultural categories - may be chosen as a point of departure for sex distinctions, and when they are so chosen, specific items of behavior vary in an apparently arbitrary way."

Perhaps the most difficult task for any investigation looking at class and culture and sex role difference is attempting to extract those sex role differences that socio-economically based from those that are culturally based. There is probably a great deal of interrelationship between the two factors but it is also possible that the socio-economic factors are stronger for some groups while the cultural factors are stronger for other groups.

According to Duberman (op. cit.) there are social class differences among children in the ways in which they describe gender roles. Lower-class children define feminine and masculine characteristics more sharply and perceive a stricter division of labor. "We can ssume, therefore, that social classes differ in their definitions of gender roles, because surely ther is no biological difference between social-class members. "Proper" behavior for each sex, then, is socially determined. This is significant because it indicates that the biological distinctions can be interpreted lossely and that human beings could alter the existing stereotypes if they wanted to do so."

Investigators have found that the differences in life style and life chances affect relationshops between the sexes in predictable ways, for large numbers of people, and despite individual variability. Yorburg (op. cit.) maintains that the key to the dissimilarity in sexual identities in the major classes is the tendency of childrearing practices to vary somewhat, and typically, within classes. The observed variation is largely a function of education, income, urban-rural residence, and ethnic origin-factors that are often interrelated.

The cultural defined conceptions of masculinity and femininity are learned by all classes but evidence from research indicates that the more educated classes are less regidly bound by these traditions. They have greater freedom and more effective choices at work, home, and at play. They are freer to adopt personality traits and behavior that have been typed for the opposite sex.

The middle class displays more mutuality in sex role interchange than exhibited by other classes. Tallman and Marotz (1970) found working class white males feel more reluctance and shame about sharing in household tasks. They are more apt to segregate themselves from women in mixed group, and they have fewer common non-erotic interests that they can discuss with women. Rainwater (1959) describing working calss white males, notes that there is the need to maintain the image of masculine toughness, command is stronger, and working class white men are less apt to be tender, sympathetic, and indulgent. The woman on the other hand, tends to be more passive, nurturing, and emotionally volatile than her middle class counterpart.

There has been evidence to show that the differences in the upbringing of working-class boys and girls lead to social distance. Hacker's (1957) work indicates that not only are girls easily absorbed as mother's helpers and boys dissuaded from any interests or activities labelled feminine, but both sexes come to, rely on same-sex gangs and cliques for friendship, moral support, and validation of self worth. She found that family and community frown on intersex dyadic relations that are specifically non-erotic, in the case of males, and do not contain the potentiality of marriage, in the case of females.

Working class young people, maintain rigid gender roles and these are instilled early. Their conceptions of the opposite sex is stereotyped. Kowarovsky (1962) found, men tend to think of women as timid, emotional, and inferior; women are apt to view men as arrogant, unsensitive, and childish.

Most research points out that class or socio-economic factors do affect sex role difference. Higher education, occupational success, greater earning power tend to be associated with more equalitarian sex role behavior. These characteristics are often associated with the mobile, nuclear family where much more overlap occurs in gender role behavior. It is also clear that socio-economic mobility oftentimes overrules cultural or ethnic influences on sex role differences. That is, economic and social mobility often remove the individuals from the ethnic traditions and highly connected networks of the parental generation allowing for more freedom in sex role behavior. Elizabeth Bott's (1971) study of London families showed that the degree of segregation in the role relationship of husband and wife varies directly with the connectedness of the family, social network.

The burdens of adhering to Title IX mandates are often greater for the schools and industries serving a multiclass community because of the differences in sex-role behavior considered to be appropriate for each class. For example, non-sexist curricula or sex equity in the employment sphere may be considered inalienable rights in one class but may be totally rejected in another as being threatening to the group's conception of sex-role behavior.

Ethnic Differences

Conceptions of masculinity and femininity, the degree of sex-typing, and the authority relationships between the sexes vary also, and typically, within the various ethnic groups in the United States, according to Yorburg (op. cit.). But she found, that as individuals and families, through time, rise in the class structure, and as each succeeding generation becomes more highly educated and urbanized, such differences tend to disappear in the wake of increasing acculturation to the modern values. It's perhaps not surprising to know that Yorburg's research shows first generation Americans (the original immigrant from foreign countries), and first generation migrants from rural areas, are usually most patriarchal and traditional in their conceptions of masculinity and femininity. The pattern varies according to the cultural heritage, the unique historical experiences of the group, and the current availability of educational and economic opportunties to various ethnic groups.

The debate about sex role difference perhaps reaches its zenith in the discussion of sex role behavior among Black-Americans. Staples (1976) points out that when it comes to the question of Black cultural farms, we find that there are no easy or definitive answers. One focus of sex-role study among Black-Americans has been on the alleged matrifocal

feature of Black family life. This matrifocality is typified not only by a family that is supported by the mother as a consequence of the absence or default of the father or fathers, but is also characterized by the strong role women play in every sector of family life. In 1965, the controversial Moynihan Report was issued calling attention to "the tangle of pathology" of black, lower-class families. Moynihan attributed the continuance of black unemployment and low income to the family role deviancy which fails to produce in children, expecially males, the kind of personality structure that leads to economic success. Moynihan's report was one of many which castigated the supposed dominant roles women played in lower-class family life. They cited the frequency of female-headed households, the lack of role models for male children as negative attributes leading to family instability.

Many investigators countered these allegations including Staples (op. cit.) who maintains that what was important, was not whether the husband or wife worked, but the family's will to survive in an era when Blacks were systematically deprived of educational and work opportunities. Despite these obstacles, Black families achieved a level of stability based on role integration. Males shared equally in the rearing of children, women participated in the defense of the family. Most Blacks would concurr that from the large available population of males (brothers, grandfathers, uncles, spouses, sibs) there was never a shortage of male role models.

Responding to the "frequency" of female-headed households, Staples stresses that most Black families adhere to the nuclear family model. In 1972, approximately two thirds of Black families had both the husband and wife present. A significantly larger percentage of Black households were headed by a female than in White families. While White families had a woman head in 9% of all such families, 30% of Black families were headed by a woman.

As eluded to earlier in this section, within the Black nuclear family there is a fluid interchanging of roles. This role flexibility is assumed to have emerged out of the economic imperatives of Black life.

Family theorists in examining sex role behavior have pointed out that most frequently men are the instrumentalists (i.e., economic support) while women tend to be strongest in the expressive sphere (i.e., domestic and emotional). Billingsley's work (1968) concluded that these tasks were interchanged by Black husbands and wives. It was not at all uncommon for Black males to engage in expressive functions in regard to maintenance of family solidarity and to assist in child-rearing and household tasks. The instrumental role of many Black women is well known. Staples has described how a large number of working Black wives help to keep many Black families in the middle-class category, or at least out of poverty. Even Black youth participate in family affairs by caring for younger siblings and occasionally working to supplement the family income.

Contrary to the negative theories about the Black matriarchy and the dominance of Black women in family relations, recent research (Hyman and Reed 1969; Mack 1974; Middleton and Putney 1960) support the fact that an equalitarian pattern typified most Black families. Hill (1972, p.18) states: "The husbands in most Black families are actively involved in decision making and the performance of household tasks that are expected of them. And, most wives, while strong, are not dominant matriarchs, but share with their husbands the making of family decisions - even in the low-income families. Joyce Ladner (1971) suggests that the myth of the Black matriarchy has been reinforced by the failure of many students of the Black family to distinguish between the terms dominant

and strong in order for the Black family to survive, she has not necessarily been dominant. Hill's research clearly shows that the husband in most Black families is the primary bread-winner. Even in lower-class Black families, the wife's income is only a small part of the total family income. In 85% of low-income Black families, the husband's income is higher than the wife's.

The work of Staples and Hale give indication that much of Black male and to some extent, female sex-role socialization develops out of peer group relations. Hale (1977) found that socialization is taken over at an early age for males by their peer group or older brothers. The sex role socialization includes gaining proficiency in athletic process, acquisition of street jargon, techniques for the establishment of male-female relationships.

One of the challenges that Black males have to face is that of the conflicting images of masculinity that predominate within the Afro-American community and the image that predominates on the broader society. Hale notes that between the ages of 8-15, the Black male is strongly to formulate an integrated conception of masculinity than that portrayed by white middle class culture. Often there is a rejection of the model of the Black professional men because their behaviors and mannerisms not reflect the macho of the ghetto. Some boy feel that they are flirting with homosexuality if they give in to behaviors they consider feminine.

Many researchers have described a very strong motherhood orientation as a part of Black female sex-role behavior and socialization. Hale believes that this may be accounted for by the fact that girls are given early responsibility for the care of siblings. For many young girls, motherhood becomes a "rite de passage" that is, by a child, the girl has now moved into adulthood status and acquires the rights accorded to mothers even if she falls

short of such legal status because of chronological age. Bearing children is a validation of their femaleness and their adulthood.

Stack (1974, p.121) reports that "unlike many other societies, black women in [The Flat] feel few if any restrictions about childbearing. Unmarried black women, young and old, are eligible to bear children, and frequently women bearing their first children are quite young. These findings do provide for an insight into the disproportionate number of births by girls in their early teens."

In summary, ethnic influences do affect sex role differences. The level of education and the distance between kin will often act to nullify many of the traditional cultural effects, but the cultural influences on sex role behavior may be stronger than the socio-economic influence among some groups.

Summary

The goals of this paper are to describe the socio-cultural patterns on sex role differentiation. It is postulated that the implications of physical and biological sex differences on sex role behavior cannot be understood without analyzing the complementary role of socio-cultural meaning of sex roles. The normative aspect of gender role behavior is fluid and can be affected by culture, class and ethnicity. The normative aspect of sex role behavior includes not only the general social behavior between men and women but also pertains to differentiation due to values and ideologies of specified groups.

The fact that sex role behavior can be affected by socio-cultural factors and that sex differentiation exists does not rule out the concept of equality of opportunity for males and females. Sex differentiation is firmly imbedded in the structures of modern societies

but the degree of sex differentiation is also in part, defined by the norms of the societies, not by biological differences alone. Where necessary, we must discover and analyze the conditions which help to maintain or to weaken these systems of norms and to consider some of the possible consequences of maintainance or change on sex role behavior.

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